Stock

MYSTICAL CAMEO PLAYS

by

ALEX MATHEWS

Permission to perform these plays in public must be obtained from the publishers.

BOHEMIAN PRESS,
MEADOW WAY,
SOMERFORD,
CHRISTCHURCH

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THE CHARM

Characters:

JOHN HAWKINS
MRS. MEANER
CONSTABLE
A MAN
A WOMAN

John Hawkins: Aye, Lady, these be lean days, let us hope for better. Will you not be wanting any cabbage along with the potatoes. They are good hard ones, 6d. each.

Mrs. Meaner: Not to-day, Mr. Hawkins. I can't afford cabbages as well as potatoes, unless you could trust me till the end of the week ?

John Hawkins: I couldn't. As I have said, these be lean days, Mrs. Meaner, it's difficult to keep going. It is not like the old days when business was brisk.

Mrs. Meaner: That was when you hawked your goods in a handcart, I suppose, Mr. Hawkins ?

John Hawkins: Handcart ! Oh yes. One had to do something. Yet I have built up this business even though I did draw a handcart. I have my troubles, Mrs. Meaner. Only last week a number of boys robbed my stall of apples and after I had arranged them so neatly. One of them has been sent to a reformatory school. I'll larn 'em.

Mrs. Meaner: The poor boy ! I heard about it. He said the best apples were on the top and those underneath were bad. He took the bad ones—three years for stealing bad apples.

John Hawkins: The Commandment says, "Thou shalt not steal." If we would be good Christians we must obey the Commandments.

Mrs. Meaner: Do not the Scriptures also say, "Give freely and it will be returned to you tenfold"?

John Hawkins: Ah, it depends how you interpret that. There are some things difficult to understand in the Scriptures, but the Commandments are the Commandments. I have to earn all I get and I can't afford to give away, indeed no. "Buy and sell," that is my motto.

Mrs. Meaner: You are a hard man, Mr. Hawkins, and some day you will repent of it. Good day. (exit)

John Hawkins: A hard man ? The old skinflint ! Let her come here again and I'll tell her something. She doesn't

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know what I have to put up with. I am compelled to sit in the shop and watch if anyone is going to rob me. Cabbages on trust ! What next ? (He goes inside the shop and seats himself on an orange box. A limping man passes the shop, looks at the stall, passes on, then returns).

John Hawkins (watching): Now what does he want ? He looks suspicious. If he wants to buy, why does he walk up and down ? No, he is up to no good. I must watch him.

(The man comes in front of the stall, looks up and down the street, a frightened look on his face. Suddenly he grabs something from the stall and limps off. John Hawkins rushes out, shouting).

John Hawkins: Stop thief ! I've been robbed !

(People appear. The limping man cannot get away, for the people crowd around him).

John Hawkins: I have been robbed. This man has stolen something from my stall.

Woman: He doesn't look as though he has the energy to rob.

Men: What can he have stolen ? There's nothing in his hand.

(A policeman now arrives.)

Policeman: Wot's this ? Come, make room. (to Hawkins) Now then, Mr. 'Awkins, wot's the trouble ?

John Hawkins: I have been outraged. This man has robbed me. I want the law on him. I saw him steal something It is in his pocket.

Policeman (to limping man): Now then, my man, produce the evidence. Wot 'ave you got ? Is it true you have something in your pocket ?

Limping Man: Yes-yes-constable. It's true. I had to do it, but I am very sorry.

Constable: Had to do it ? What do you mean ? Remember, you are confessing to a crime.

John Hawkins: There you are, constable, he admits it. He would rob a good Christian.

Limping Man (who would collapse but for the policeman): I had to do it.

Constable (kindly): Tell me, my man, did you steal because you were hungry ?

Limping Man: No, constable, because I am sick.

John Hawkins: An excuse. Lock him up.

Constable: But that conveys little, my man. What was it you stole ?

Limping Man: A potato.

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John Hawkins: A potato ? A paltry theft.
Crowd: Only a potato! Let him go.
Woman: Poor fellow, he is sick and must be hungry.
John Hawkins: The potato was mine and he stole it. "Thou shalt not steal."
Constable: In the eyes of the law it is a theft. Why did you steal it (sympathetically) ?
Limping Man: Because I had to. You see, constable, I suffer from rheumatism and I read in a book that if a sufferer carried in his pocket a potato it would act as a Charm against rheumatics, provided the potato was stolen. Let me keep it.
Crowd: Let him keep it.
Constable: Will you prefer the charge, Mr. 'Awkins?
(Hawkins walks back into his shop without a word).
Constable: Get along, my man, and don't lose the potato.

* * *

THE BIBLE JUDGE

Characters:

SUSANNAH HAYNOKES
MARY EPFORD
JOSEPH EPFORD
THE PRIEST

Place: Wingrove, near Aylesbury. Time: 1736. ...

Priest: Why have you come here?
Mary: Susannah has bewitched my spinning-wheel and it will no longer go round.
Joseph: I can justify my wife's statement, for the spinning-wheel is indeed bewitched and I demand that Susannah be tried by the Village Bible to prove her guilt.
Priest: What do you say to this, Mary ?
Mary: I will swear before any magistrate that what I accuse Susannah of is true.
Priest: Know you that this is a serious charge against your neighbour ?
Joseph and Mary: Yes, father, we do.
Priest: And will you abide by what the Holy Book says in answer to your accusation ?
Joseph and Mary: We will.
Priest: And now, Susannah, are you guilty of witchcraft ?
Susannah: No, father, they both lie. I did not, nor could not

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bewitch their spinning-wheel, nor anything else.

Mary: She lies, she muttered over it whilst I was working and then the wheel stopped.

Priest: Susannah, will you abide by what the Holy Book says to justify you?

Susannah: I will, father, for the Holy Book does not lie

Priest: Here is the piece of wood with which we shall open the Bible. Who will open first?

Joseph: As you are the witness to our accusation, and as you are a Minister of God, 'twere better you opened first.

Priest: Very well then. (The Priest inserts the flat stick into the Bible and where the end of the stick points he reads): "Therefore judge nothing before thy time, until the Lord come who both will bring to light hidden things of darkness." (Cor. 1, 6.)

Priest: You have heard. Now, Joseph, you next.

Joseph: I think Susannah ought to open now as she is the guilty one.

Susannah: As you persist in thinking that I am guilty of witchcraft, it is better I ask my question last of all, as that will be my defence.

Priest: It shall be so. Now, Joseph, open.

Joseph (reads): "God forbid, yes, let God be true, but every man a liar, as it is written that thou might'st be justified in thy sayings when thou art judged." (Romans III, 4).

Priest: Note your answers, my children. Open, Mary.

Mary (reads): "But if while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ minister of sin? God forbid. (Galatians II, 17.)

Priest: And now, Susannah, as you are accused, ask the Book to answer for you.

Susannah (reads): "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of the other." (Ephesians IV, 25.)

Priest: And now, my children, you have heard the Word of God. Hearken unto it for the Word is the Law.

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THE WHISPERING COURT OF ROCHFORD

Characters:

HAROLD
TOM
LORD OF THE MANOR
BECK
LONGBOW
BRIAN
ARMSTRONG
TUCKER
FLETCHER
DICKSON
STRANGEWAYS
SECRETARY

Two cyclists dismount on the Stambridge Road (Essex) and gaze at a post which marks the site of "The Whispering Court of the Manor." Time: Evening.

Harold: I say, Tom, that's a queer thing, isn't it? "The Whispering Court of the Manor.' I wonder what it means?

Tom: Hard to say. Must have been a place where every whisper could have been heard. You know what it is like in some big churches. If you cough it can be heard all over the place.

Harold: That's true. But there's something strange about this place. The authorities wouldn't put a post up to mark this site unless there was something important about it. There's a legend in connection with it, I feel sure.

Tom: Perhaps we can enquire when we get to Stambridge. In the meantime, I am tired and I see no reason why we should not rest here for a while.

Harold: All right, have it your own way.

(They settle down on the mossy bank of the road).

Tom: That's comfortable (yawns). Sleep, say I.

Harold: "The Whispering Court"—the name fascinates me. Perhaps the place suffered from ghosts.

Tom: Shut up about ghosts, there aren't any. Settle down (yawns) and get some rest, we've got three more days, then back to work; that's a ghost I don't like. (yawns.

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then sleeps.)

Harold (to himself): "The Whispering Court"—I wonder what it means (yawns). It's some mediaeval legend, I suppose. (falls asleep.)

(Up curtain. Discovered: the Lord of the Manor at the Whispering Court. Time: 14th century. Midnight. A number of people are present. The Lord of the Manor is reading out names, and as he reads out each name there is an echoing whisper.)

Lord of the Manor: Beck; Longbow; Brian; Armstrong; Tucker Fletcher; Dickson; Strangeways (no answer to this name). Where is Strangeways? He is an old tenant and ought to be here now. He must realise that he will have to double his rent for every ten minutes he is late. Let us proceed to business. Beck!

Beck: Five pounds, sir.

Secretary (recording with coal): No more, no less.

Lord of the Manor: Longbow!

Longbow: Three pounds, sir.

Secretary: Five minutes late last quarter; six pounds ten.

Longbow: But—my Lord—

Secretary: Six pounds ten.

Lord of the Manor: From midnight to cock-crow on the Wednesday following Michaelmas Day. You know the rules; you arrived five minutes after midnight.

Secretary: Six pounds twelve.

Longbow: Here is the money. I delay no longer.

Lord of the Manor: Brian!

Secretary: Four pounds five and a bushel of wheat.

Brian: Here is the money, Lord, but no wheat. I have had a poor harvest.

Secretary: Four pounds five and two bushels of wheat.

Lord of the Manor: Where is the money?

Brian: Here, me Lord.

Secretary: Three bushels of wheat and one for every month until next quarter.

Lord of the Manor: Armstrong!

Secretary: Sixteen pounds, shoes for five horses and nails supplied.

Lord of the Manor: Have you all these?

Armstrong: The shoes and nails, me Lord, but no money.

Secretary: Thirty-two pounds, shoes for ten horses and nails supplied.

Armstrong: My Lord—

Lord of the Manor: Thirty-two pounds, shoes for ten horses, nails supplied and one horse. Tucker!

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Secretary: Five bags of coal, the labour of two sons and services of wife.

Lord of the Manor: What have you to say ?

Tucker: You have had my sons' labour and yourself the services of my wife. The coal is outside.

Lord of the Manor (to Secretary): Go you outside and vouch for this; bring in a piece for recording. (Secretary retires and returns with a sample of coal.)

Secretary (recording): Debt clear, my Lord.

Lord of the Manor: Fletcher !

Secretary: One side of beef and two pounds.

Fletcher: Here is the money, me Lord, and I have a cow without. She is the last and I cannot cut her in half.

Secretary: Debt clear, my Lord.

Lord of the Manor: Dickson !

Secretary: Twenty-five pounds, one farm, two ploughs and twelve horses.

Lord of the Manor: Have you all these ?

Dickson: You have the farm, me Lord, and two ploughs. I have no money and if you ever get the horses may you ride to Hell.

Secretary: What now, my Lord ?

Lord of the Manor: Let him be hanged by his own rope. Strangeways !

(The figure of an old man is seen coming through the door. He looks ghastly pale.)

Strangeways (in a hollow voice): Strangeways.

Lord of the Manor: Why art thou late ? Knowest thou that thy fine has been trebled by now ?

Secretary: Thirty-six pounds.

Lord of the Manor: Have you the money

Strangeways: My Lord, I crave thy pardon for coming hither at so late an hour. But I have had an accident on the way and had difficulty in freeing myself from my body which is lying dead by the roadside. I come therefore in the spirit that thou might'st not fine me or mine too heavily by forfeit.

Secretary: One dead man's clothes. Court adjourns.

(Curtain down. Discovered: cyclists.)

Harold: One dead man's clothes.

Tom: Harold, wake up, it's raining, let's on our way. What were you dreaming ? One dead man's clothes ?

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